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## SECTOR 9 — CHART INFORMATION

## SECTOR 9

### DUNCANSBY HEAD TO TARBAT NESS

**Plan.**—This sector describes the NE coast of Scotland from Duncansby Head to Tarbat Ness, including Dornoch Firth. The descriptive sequence is from N to S.

#### General Remarks

**9.1** Several bays indent the N part of this stretch of coast and the high, steep cliffs along the shoreline are backed by high hills. Close inland, several of the peaks rise to heights of about 600m. There are only numerous small fishing harbors in this area and no major ports.

**Tides—Currents.**—A countercurrent sets N along the shores of Freswick Bay, beginning at about 5 hours 45 minutes before HW at Dover. Along the N side of the bay, this countercurrent runs until about 3 hours 15 minutes after HW at Dover.

Along the S side of Sinclairs Bay, the tidal currents set E most of the time.

At a position about 3 miles offshore and to the S of Wick, the S current begins about 5 hours before HW at Dover. The N current begins about 1 hour 15 minutes after HW at Dover. These currents attain rates at springs of 1.8 knots.

At a position about 3 miles ESE of Clyth Ness, the S tidal current begins 4 hours before HW at Dover and the N current begins 2 hours after HW at Dover.

Off Dunbeath Harbor, the S current begins 4 hours before HW at Dover and the N current begins 2 hours after HW at Dover. These currents attain rates of 1 knot at springs.

Off the village of Brora, the N tidal current, which attains a rate of 0.5 to 0.8 knot, begins about 1 hour before HW at Dover and runs for 7 to 8 hours, after which the S current begins. The S current, which attains a rate of 0.5 knot, sets SE and away from the land.

Off Tain Bar, at a position about 3.5 miles W of Tarbat Ness, the SW current begins 5 hours 25 minutes before HW at Dover and the NE current begins 1 hour 20 minutes after HW at Dover. The current, which attains a rate of about 0.5 knot at springs, is more or less rotary, clockwise, with the SW current changing gradually from S to W and the NW current changing from about N to E.

Off Dornoch Point, the W current attains a rate of 1 knot and the E current attains a rate of 1.5 knots at springs.

Off Ard na Cailc, the W current begins 3 hours 30 minutes before HW at Dover and the E current begins 2 hours 15 minutes after HW at Dover. There is practically no period of slack water. The W current attains a rate of 2 knots and the E current attains a rate of 2.5 knots.

In the inner part of Dornoch Firth, the W current runs for only about 3 hours, continuing until the tide has fallen by about 0.6m, after which the E current begins and runs for 9 hours. At half ebb, the current attains a rate of 5 to 6 knots.

**Caution.**—Submarines exercise frequently, both surfaced and dived, in areas off this stretch of coast.

Several oil and gas fields, with production platforms and submarine pipelines, have been established off the coast and may best be seen on the chart.

#### Duncansby Head to Dornoch Firth

**9.2 Duncansby Head** (58°39'N., 3°01'W.), a steep-sided promontory, is the NE extremity of Scotland. It is 62m high and fringed by several detached rocks. A main light is shown from a prominent tower, 11m high, standing on the point. A racon is situated at the light. A radio mast stands close SSW of the light.

**Skirsa Head** (58°36'N., 3°02'W.) is located 3 miles S of Duncansby Head. The coast between consists of sheer cliffs and is fronted by several detached pinnacles of rock standing on drying ledges which extend up to about 200m seaward. The Stack of Duncansby, the largest and highest of these detached pinnacles, stands 1 mile S of Duncansby Head and can be seen protruding over the land. Skirsa Head consists of a sheer cliff, 30m high, with numerous caves penetrating its base.

**Freswick Bay** (58°35'N., 3°04'W.) is entered between Skirsa Head and Ness Head, 1 mile SSW. Ness Head is fronted by several shallow rocks and the ruins of a castle are situated near the cliff edge, 0.5 mile S of it. A prominent building stands near the head and a small pier is situated on the N shore of the bay. Coasters can obtain anchorage in a depth of 6m, sand, about 0.2 mile SSW of the pier. However, local knowledge is advised as a dangerous wreck lies in the entrance of the bay.

**Sinclairs Bay** (58°30'N., 3°05'W.) lies between Brough Head, located 2 miles SSW of Ness Head, and Noss Head, 4.5 miles SSE. It has no off-lying dangers. The W shore is low and sandy, but the N and S shores are steep and rocky. Keiss Harbor and Ackergill Harbor, both fishing boat harbors, lie on the NW side and in the SW corner, respectively, of the bay. A conspicuous water tower, 20m high, stands on rising ground, 1.4 miles WNW of Brough Head.

**9.3 Noss Head** (58°29'N., 3°03'W.), the S entrance point, is a bold headland. It has a sheer, dark, and steep-to face, 37m high. A light is shown from a prominent tower, 18m high, standing on the point. Several prominent radio masts stand close W of the light.

Keiss Castle, a modern building, stands 4 miles NNW of Noss Head. It is situated behind the ruins of an ancient castle and is prominent from seaward. Ackergill Tower, a gray building, stands 2 miles W of Noss Head and resembles a castle.

During good weather, vessels can anchor as convenient in Sinclairs Bay, but it is not safe in unsettled conditions. With winds from between SW and SE, the best anchorage is in a depth of 16m about 1.2 miles WNW of Noss Head.

**Staxigeo** (58°27'N., 3°03'W.), a prominent village, stands at the head of a small inlet, 1.5 miles S of Noss Head. A dangerous wreck lies about 0.6 mile ESE of this inlet.



DUNCANSBY HEAD LIGHT

*Photo courtesy of Scottish Radianee*

NOSS HEAD LIGHT AND GRINIGOE CASTLE RUINS

*Photo courtesy of Scottish Radianee*

**Caution.**—Due to the existence of submarine cables, a prohibited anchorage area lies within Sinclairs Bay and may best be seen on the local chart. Anchorage is prohibited in the SW part of the bay and within 0.7 mile of the S shore.

**9.4 Wick** (58°26'N., 3°05'W.) ([World Port Index No. 32380](#)), an important fishing center, lies at the head of Wick Bay and consists of two harbors, River Harbor and Main

Harbor, which are protected by stone piers. The bay is entered between North Head and South Head, 0.7 mile SSW. It is steep-sided and fringed on both sides with rock ledges.

**Winds—Weather.**—The bay is very exposed and winds from between NE and SSW can build up heavy seas. Occasionally, even though W winds or calms are being experienced at Wick, a heavy swell from the effects of E winds in the North Sea can be experienced in the entrance of the bay.



ACKERGILL TOWER

During periods of severe frost, with little or no wind, a heavy E swell can also be experienced.

**Tides—Currents.**—The tides rise about 3.5m at springs and 2.8m at neaps.

There is usually little or no current experienced in the bay, but the tidal currents set strongly parallel to the coast near the entrance.

**Depths—Limitations.**—The bay has a general depth of 16m. The remains of an old breakwater, marked by a beacon, lie on a partially drying spit that extends up to 300m NE from the S shore of the bay, midway between South Head and the harbors.

Main Harbor has an entrance, 18.3m wide, and is divided by a jetty into two basins. This harbor provides 1,370m of quayage and is mostly used by fishing vessels. It has depths of 5 to 5.3m at HWS and 4.4 to 4.7m at HWN. Small vessels of up to 83m in length and 4.9m draft can be handled alongside.

River Harbor, lying NE of the N pier of Main Harbor, has an entrance, 36.5m wide, and has been developed into an oil and gas facility service base. A berth, 137m long, and a swinging basin, have dredged depths of 6.3m at LWS. An approach channel, 40m wide and 300m long, is dredged to a depth of 6.3m at LWS.

**Aspect.**—A coastguard lookout and signal station tower, 6m high, stands on South Head and is conspicuous. Another tower, a memorial tower, stands among houses on top of the cliffs, 0.4 mile W of North Head.

A prominent light tower, 11m high, stands on the head of the S pier at Main Harbor and a tall chimney stands near the root. The prominent tank of an ice-making plant, 18m high, stands near the outer end of the jetty which projects into Main Harbor. Two framework floodlight towers, each 32m high, stand on the N pier of Main Harbor and are conspicuous.

A directional light is shown from a metal column, 7m high, standing on the N end of a bridge at the head of River Harbor.

**Pilotage.**—Pilotage is compulsory for vessels over 90 grt, except fishing vessels and yachts. Vessels should send an ETA at least 2 hours in advance. Pilots may be contacted by VHF and usually board about 0.5 mile NE of South Head.

**Anchorage.**—Good anchorage can be taken in Wick Bay, over a bottom of sand, with winds from SSW through N to NE.

However, with winds from other directions, anchorage may be unsafe or untenable.

**Caution.**—Numerous small fishing boats, fishing with hand lines, may be encountered in the vicinity of Wick Bay.

During strong E gales, seas often roll over both harbor piers and a considerable scend is experienced in the basins.

As the storm parapet on the S pier of Main Harbor obscures the view of the approach to the entrance, vessels should give the head of this pier a wide berth.

An area of foul ground, on which there is unexploded ordnance, is reported to lie on the N side of the bay.

Several dangerous wrecks lie in the approaches to Wick Bay and may best be seen on the chart.

**9.5** The coast extending between the S entrance point of Wick Bay and Clyth Ness, 9 miles SW, is mainly dark with rugged cliffs rising in places to heights of 45m. The shore is deeply indented by narrow gullies and closely fringed with detached masses of rock.

**Sarclet Haven** (58°22'N., 3°06'W.), a small cove, lies on the N side of Sarclet Head. Ruined breakwaters extend from the sides of this cove and form a small fishing boat harbor. The entrance is only 11m wide and is open to the heavy swell that sets in from the E. A dangerous wreck is reported to lie close off the entrance to the cove. A village stands on the high ground above the harbor.

Wester Whale Geo, a small unprotected cove and fishing station, lies 2.5 miles SW of Sarclet Head.

**Clyth Ness** (58°19'N., 3°13'W.), a broad and rounded headland, is backed by hills, which rise to heights of 160m, and fringed by a detached and partly drying rock ledge. A light is shown from a conspicuous tower, 13m high, standing on this point.

A conspicuous radio mast, 229m high, stands on the slope of a hill, 5 miles WNW of Clyth Ness. An aeronautical light is shown from this mast and a group of masts stands on the summit of a hill, 0.7 mile SSW of it.

The coast extending between Clyth Ness and Dornoch Firth, 27 miles SW, is mostly cliffy with several small boat harbors.

Lybster Harbor lies on the NE side of a small inlet, 2.6 miles WSW of Clyth Ness. This fishing boat station is formed by a small basin and is protected by breakwaters.

Achastle Shore and Forse Cove, two small fishing stations, lie 0.8 mile SW of Lybster Harbor and are separated by a point which is surmounted by the ruins of a castle and a tower, 9m high. Fishing boats are landed on the gravel beaches at these two places.

Latheronwheel, a small fishing boat basin, lies 1.7 miles SW of Forse Cove. It is situated at the mouth of a stream and is enclosed by a pier.

Dunbeath Bay, fringed by rocks, is entered 2.1 miles SW of Latheronwheel. A small fishing harbor, protected by breakwaters, lies at the mouth of a stream on the N side of the bay. A very prominent castle, 21m high, is situated 0.8 mile SW of the harbor. The coast extending NE of this bay consists of cliffs, 6 to 20m high.

**Caution.**—Anchorage is prohibited in the vicinity of a submarine cable which extends SE from Dunbeath Bay to an offshore oil field.



*Photo courtesy of Scottish Radianee*

## CLYTH NESS LIGHT

**9.6 Berriedale Ness** (58°10'N., 3°31'W.), located 4.5 miles SW of Dunbeath Bay, is backed by a hill, 195m high. Bodach an Uird (The Needle), a pinnacle rock, lies close offshore, 0.3 mile NE of this point. It is 61m high, but cannot be distinguished except from close inshore.

The Paps of Caithness, a ridge of bold peaks, rises 4 miles NW of Berriedale Ness and are composed of white quartz. Scaraben, the summit of the E end of the ridge, is 624m high. Its prominent crest appears from seaward as three distinct peaks of nearly equal height. At times, these peaks appear to be covered with snow. Morven, a mountain, rises 3 miles W of Scaraben. It is 704m high and appears from all directions as a sharp peak.

The coast extending between Berriedale Ness and Helmsdale, 6 miles SW, consists of sheer cliffs divided by deep ravines. The cliffs in the vicinity of the former point are 120 to 150m high and are composed of red sandstone variegated by white streaks and patches. The cliffs nearer to Helmsdale are lower and are mostly composed of granite. This stretch of coast is closely backed by a prominent range of hills known as the Ord of Caithness. The hills rise to heights of over 390m and the summit of the range is surmounted by a conspicuous radio mast.

**9.7 Beatrice Oil Field** (58°08'N., 3°03'W.), with three production platforms, lies centered 14 miles E of Berriedale Ness. A submarine power cable extends NW from the field to the shore and a submarine pipeline extends SW from the field to a bay lying on the W side of Moray Firth.

**Helmsdale** (58°07'N., 3°39'W.), lying at the mouth of a river, is an important fishing harbor. It is enclosed by a ruined breakwater and a pier. The village is situated on the NE side of the river which is spanned by a prominent road bridge. A

conspicuous radio mast stands on the summit of a hill, 2 miles NNE of the village.

An old harbor basin lies above the bridge and is no longer used. A new harbor basin lies at the mouth of the river. It is protected by piers and has an entrance, 17m wide. A bar consisting of boulders and stones, over which the sea breaks during gales from between E and S, extends across the approach, about 100m seaward of the entrance. Fishing vessels of up to 16.5m in length and 3.5m draft can be handled.

Between Helmsdale and Brora Point, 8.7 miles SW, the coast is generally low and a wide sandy beach fronts the S part of this stretch.

**Approaches to Dornoch Firth**

**9.8** The approach to Dornoch Firth lies between Brora Point and Tarbat Ness, 8.7 miles SSE. The firth itself is entered between Dornoch Point and White Ness.

**Brora Point** (58°01'N., 3°51'W.) is located 8.7 miles SW of Helmsdale and is surmounted by a prominent group of radio masts. The village of Brora is situated near the mouth of a river, close N of the point. A tall chimney stands on the N bank of the river, 0.3 mile above the mouth.

Lech Robie, a rocky ledge, extends up to about 0.3 mile SE from the point and dries up to 2.7m. Foul ground extends up to 200m seaward of this ledge.

Ben Horn, a conspicuous summit, is 518m high and rises 5.5 miles WNW of Brora Point.

Dunrobin Castle stands on a ridge above the shore, 3.5 miles WSW of Brora Point. It is a conspicuous large, turreted building backed by hills.

The village of Golspie, with a conspicuous church spire, is situated 1 mile WSW of Dunrobin Castle. The coast between is

backed by cultivated land. This village is fronted by a short and shallow pier which has a tall chimney standing near its root. A bank, with a depth of less than 2m, lies about 0.3 mile seaward of the pier and the sea breaks heavily over it during strong NE winds.

A monument, consisting of a large statue of the first Duke of Sutherland, stands 1 mile NW of the village. It surmounts the summit of Ben a Bhragie, a flat-topped mountain, which is 380m high.

Silver Rock, 260m high and prominent, rises 1.2 miles SW of the monument. This peak is steep-sided with a rounded top. A hospital and a school building, both prominent, are situated at the SW side of Golspie, 0.7 mile SE of the monument.

**9.9 Ferry Point** (57°56'N., 4°00'W.) is located 2.5 miles SSW of Golspie, at the S end of a low peninsula. It is marked by a beacon and forms the N entrance point of the channel leading into Loch Fleet.

**Loch Fleet** (57°57'N., 4°03'W.), the estuary of the Fleet River, is a saltwater lagoon which is connected to the sea by Little Ferry, a narrow entrance channel. The loch mostly dries and extends 2.5 miles WNW from Ferry Point to an embankment which carries a road. Sluice gates, situated in the embankment, at the NW end of the loch, control the flow of water from the river. A shifting bar, with a depth of 0.6m, fronts the narrow entrance. Within this bar, there are depths of 1.2 to 3.7m in the fairway. A partly derelict village is situated 0.4 mile W of Ferry Point. Overhead cables, with a vertical clearance of 20m, span the entrance channel close E of the village.

Embo Point, fronted by a small and shallow stone pier, is located 1.9 miles SSE of Ferry Point. The village of Embo is situated 0.5 mile NNW of the point and a conspicuous house, with a white front, stands among trees 0.5 mile SW of it.

**Dornoch Point** (57°51'N., 4°00'W.), the N entrance point of the firth, is located 4.5 miles S of Ferry Point. The coast between is low and sandy. The point is the S extremity of a flat peninsula, 4m high, which consists of sand and grass and is subject to changes in shape. An airstrip is situated close inland of the point and the small town of Dornoch, with a prominent hotel and cathedral spire, stands 1 mile NNW of it. An area of drying quicksands, known as Gizzen Briggs, extends up to about 1.7 miles E of the point.

**9.10 Tarbat Ness** (57°52'N., 3°46'W.), a low and red sandstone point, is located at the NE end of a promontory which projects 4 miles NE from the coast. A main light is shown from a conspicuous tower, 41m high, standing 0.2 mile SW of the extremity of the point. A racon is situated at the light. A prominent radio tower stands 1.5 miles SSW of the light.

Tarbat Ledge, with depths of less than 8m, extends up to about 0.7 mile NE of the point. Culloden Rock, with a depth of 1.6m, lies on this ledge, about 0.2 mile NE of the point. Vessels are advised to give this point a wide berth and should keep in depths of not less than 22m.

**Portmahomack** (57°50'N., 3°50'W.), a village, stands along the shore of a small bay, 2.5 miles SSW of Tarbat Ness. The coast between mostly consists of pebble ridges fringed by



*Photo courtesy of Scottish Radiance*

TARBAT NESS LIGHT

rocks. This village has two churches and is fronted by a small boat harbor which dries and is protected by an L-shaped pier. Local knowledge is required as foul ground and shallow rocks encumber the approach.

**Inver Bay** (57°49'N., 3°54'W.), small and filled by drying sandbanks, lies 2.5 miles WSW of Portmahomack. A narrow and tortuous channel leads through the sandbanks to a small fishing village situated at the head of the bay. It is only used by boats with local knowledge.

**White Ness** (57°51'N., 3°57'W.), a low and sandy point, is the N extremity of a tract of marshes and sand dunes called Morrich More. It forms the S entrance point of Dornoch Firth. Whiteness Sands, an area of drying quicksands, extend up to 1 mile seaward in the vicinity of this point and the shoreline is not easily discernible.

**Caution.**—A firing and bombing range is situated on Morrich More and extends seaward into the approaches to the firth. A light is occasionally shown from a mast standing on Morrich More in connection with this range. Target floats may be moored in the approaches to the firth.

Salmon fishing is carried out, from the middle of February to late August, along the W side of the Tarbat Ness promontory and the nets may extend a considerable distance from the shore.

### **Dornoch Firth**

**9.11** The firth is entered between Dornoch Point and White Ness, 1.8 miles ESE, and extends 15 miles inland. It is encumbered, especially near the entrance, with numerous shifting sandbanks and is spanned by a road bridge, 3.2 miles WSW of Dornoch Point.

Shallow banks, which extend E from Gizzen Briggs and NE from Whiteness Sands, merge about 3 miles E of Dornoch Point and form Tain Bar. This bar fronts the entrance channel which leads through the drying banks. It is reported to have a least depth of 1.2m, but is subject to frequent changes. Vessels may anchor in depths of 6 to 7m, mud and sand with fair

holding ground, about 0.8 mile ESE of Dornoch Point. This berth is sheltered from NE swells by Gizzen Briggs.

During E gales, the sea is reported to break over Tain Bar, Gizzen Briggs, and Whiteness Sands.

Between the entrance and the road bridge, the firth opens out on both sides. A bight indenting the N shore lies between Dornoch Point and Ard na Cailc, 3.2 miles WSW, and is completely filled with Cuthill Sands and Dornoch Sands, both of which dry. Another bight indenting the S side of the firth lies between White Ness and Ardjachie Point, 4.2 miles W, and is completely filled by Tain Sands, a drying bank.

The small town of Tain is situated at the head of the S bight, 2 miles SE of Ardjachie Point. There is a conspicuous church tower standing in the center of Tain, but the town, which is situated on a slope, merges into the background and is not prominent from the firth. The conspicuous chimney of a large distillery stands 1 mile SE of Ardjachie Point.

The road bridge, with three spans, crosses the firth close W of Ardjachie Point and has a vertical clearance of 11m. To the W of the bridge, the firth continues inland in a general WNW direction for about 10 miles.

The firth can be entered by small vessels with light drafts. Local knowledge is essential, but licensed pilots are not available.